Poisonous By-Products

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★ At a certain point a war becomes an independent entity: it takes off, proceeds on its own. We still talk about controlling the Vietnam war. Can we? Washington is a city where temperatures are rising, epithets increasing, minds closing. Poll takers, like Louis Harris & Associates and Sam Lubell, find LBJ's popularity dropping; the public (says Harris) is "seeking a military solution to what is generally regarded as a frightening stalemate." That's the motto: Get tough and get it over with.

You can see why it's so; the boys are there, therefore we must support the boys. Our boys are brave, therefore our war must be just. A *non sequitur*, sure, but who reasons in wartime; are you a Vietnik? We see, alas, various signs of nastiness: Majority Whip Russell Long (D, La.), blatherskiting in the Senate about Old Glory; celebrated columnists suddenly denouncing other columnists; a recommendation by Gen. Maxwell Taylor, retired White House adviser, that we mine Haiphong Harbor (hard to believe he didn't have White House clearance); McCarthyism in the State Department with the ouster of liberal Abba Schwartz, advocate of visa interchange with Iron Curtain countries; McCarthyism in the Justice Department with crackdown on the WEB DuBois Clubs.

Take the DuBois Clubs. The Justice Department has tried 20 times and more to force organizations to register under the 1950 Subversive Activities Control Act and has never done it yet. Now the Department makes a martyr out of the DuBois Clubs (2,500 members, mostly undergraduates, mostly against Vietnam). What happens? Somebody bombs its headquarters in California and we're off and away. Nobody loves to feel persecuted more than Rebellious Youth, and we suppose the DuBois Clubs, or their equivalent, will now double membership in no time.

The sour note extends into politics. Gallup Poll reading on LBJ's popularity – previous poll, 61 percent; latest poll, 56 percent. Quite a drop. We don't know what the President will do. He told a columnist here recently he thinks Americans want to go all-out when they fight a war; blame him for restraint. He may well be right.